

MEMORIES OF WEDGE,

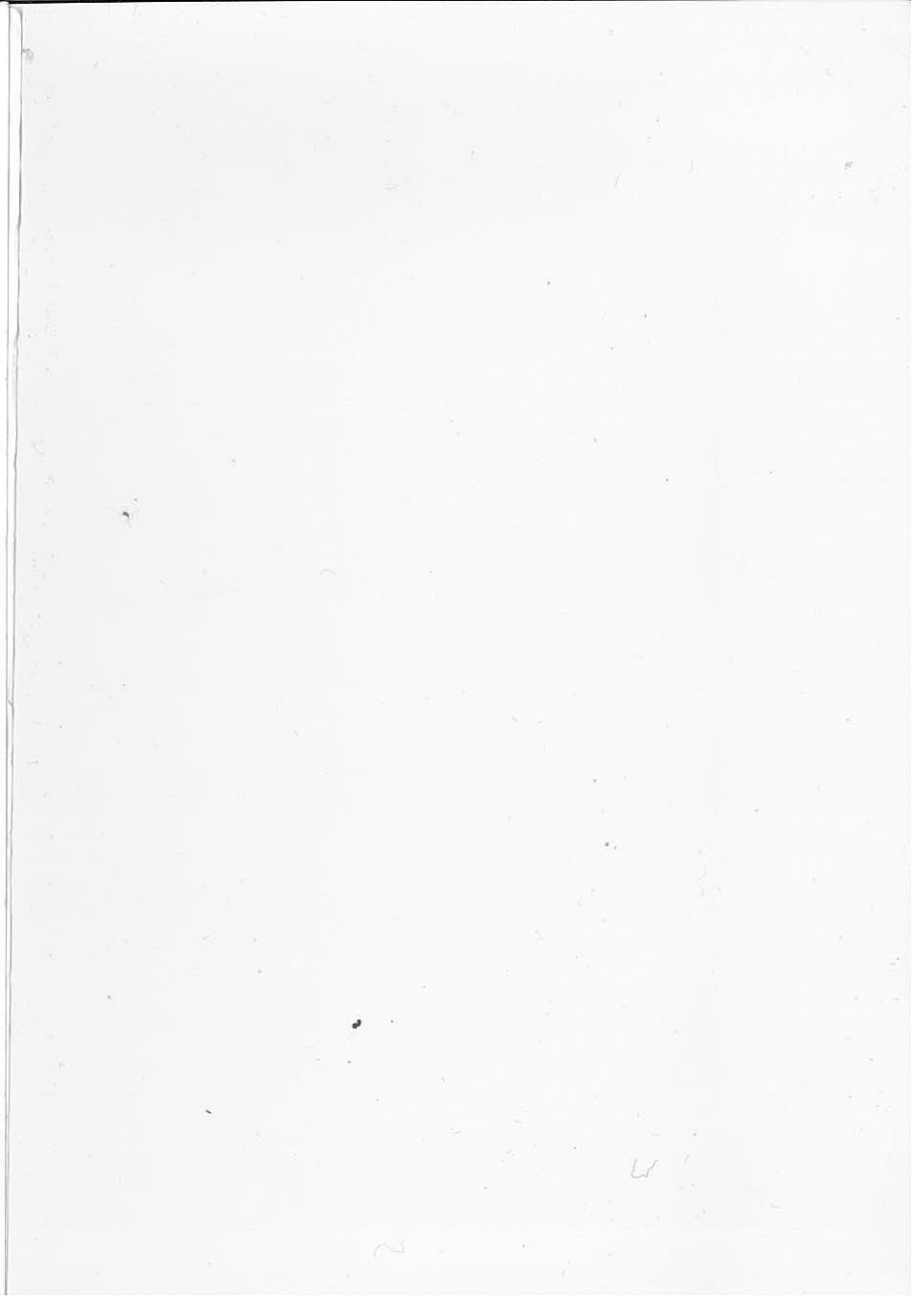


The Cairn at the RAAF Memorial Grove near Canberra.

(Photo:Allan Dennison.)

**7 RADAR, WEDGE
ISLAND**
1943 - 44

19th REUNION 2007



A WARM AND SINCERE WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS.

Today we are happy indeed to welcome all visitors - especially our friends from 10 Radar at Cape Jervis - a beautiful location looking across Backstairs Passage towards Kangaroo Island.

7 and 10 Radars were the guardians of the shipping lanes which crossed the two Gulfs below Adelaide, also the approaches to the important gulf ports. But the stations had one big difference - 10 Radar had a large complement of WAAAF Operators, and today we are delighted that a number of those one-time operators are with us.

So please enjoy our reunion, and make it your reunion too. Share our memories for they are so similar to your own.

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OUR NATIONAL REUNIONS.

Our National Radar Reunions began in 1988, and so did our history, our photo collections, and our yarns and stories. Ed. Simmonds and Norm Smith surely began something when they first spoke with 'Macca' on the 'Australia All Over' programme one Sunday morning.

A big response and much interest was generated, and the first reunion in Canberra in 1988 further fanned it.. Stories by the dozen came in....photos arrived in their hundreds.... technical history was researched, and books of radar yarns were produced, followed by quite a few radar station histories. There was a great response when seven or eight national reunions were organised, at least one in each state.

But that all began 19 years ago now. We were all only around the 60 mark then...and we're now 19 years older of course and all at the OBE stage. The inevitable has long since started, and keen radar folk, all anxious to have our proud and impressive history recorded and recognised, have since been dropping off the perch, or just dropping out, literally by the dozen.

The great enthusiastic effort of the 90's has died away, and now it is in danger of completely ending, except for the efforts of the few.

So...if you have any radar history in historical fact, or story, or photo...or if a mate or anyone you know has anything worthwhile, please do your utmost to see that it is preserved. There is a Radar Archives at Point Cook Museum which is the right place for it.

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OUR WEDGE REUNIONS.

We've now enjoyed 18 happy Wedge reunions, and in a fit of nostalgia, I looked back over the photographic records. There I found mainly happy memories, and just a few sad reminders of those good folk who no longer join with us on that one day of the year.

The first reunion evidently was in 1989, though Doug did start his marshalling programme in 1988 - all quite a long time ago now. Until 1994 we gathered at the Italian Club in Carrington Street, with one exception in 1991 when we assembled at the CTA Club in North Terrace which was a comfortable and roomy place I recall.

Since 1995 all our 'get-togethers' have been in the Mitchell Room at the Marion where we have been welcomed and well-looked after.

As our reunions have more or less co-incided with the big National Reunions, it's been natural to 'show and tell' much from those big shows interstate when any number up to 500 attended, with 160 at the most recent national show at Geelong. Our biggest gathering was 50 which for a tiny speck of land out in Spencer Gulf was pretty good really, and quite enough to look after, particularly as our first show in 1989 attracted only 14.

Since then the folk of 7 Radar and Wedge have come from every state except the Northern Territory, and the faithful still come from afar, even from over the border, and regularly too. We've had personal reminiscences, a video or two, photo displays and radar displays of various stations where the Wedge men were posted. - and some of those were pretty weird and hairy too. We've even seen a model of Flinders' "INVESTIGATOR" sailing across our Anniversary cake - and a model of our old island doover seeking out the secrets of the room. Every reunion has had its strange and wonderful gimmicks - and all these have been worthwhile, for a novel approach is necessary each time to maintain interest.

We introduced a cake as a novelty, and John Beiers joined us for the first time in 1994.... a happy encounter that one, for over the succeeding years he has exerted his talents and influence from the top table to make everything go well. And apart from that he piloted a Cessna over to Wedge with 3 passengers each time on board.

Now we hear there are a few new homes on Wedge...no B, and B's mind you - but I guess the really keen fishermen who have enjoyed Wedge in the past will still be content to sleep on the beach or stick up a tent there. But it's all been good, enjoyable fun - more like a family gathering, for we all know each other, and we all look forward to the Annual Wedge Do when we meet old friends again.

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INSTALLING THE GEAR AT 7 RADAR ON WEDGE.

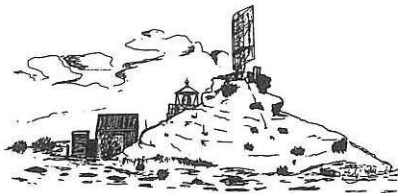
(Cec. Blumenthal)

With the pressure really on in '42 and '43 to provide radar coverage across Australia's north, I had several months at Darwin and Bathurst Island. I then returned to 1 RIMU in Sydney where I was appointed to head No. 2 Technical Installation Party. After installing two LW/AW's along the NSW coast to serve until the permanent equipment became operational, I was instructed to proceed to instal the gear at 7 RS in South Australia. Sgt. Emerson who had been with me in the Technical Installation Party and another Sgt. Mechanic were to accompany the equipment on the train to ensure safe transhipment at the change of gauge and to guard it generally. I was to go ahead to make sure all was ready to get it on air. Arriving in Adelaide, I first proceeded to Parafield where the new station was forming up, and after a few days, the CO, P/O Glover, asked me to take an advance party to Wedge. It was arranged that I go on MV MINNIPA to Port Lincoln, thence by Ray Welfare's launch to the Island. On arriving in Lincoln, it was discovered that Welfare was away with a party of doctors on a fishing trip in the Bight, but was expected back in about a week. So we booked in at a local hotel where we enjoyed a very informal and relaxing few days before Welfare returned. I confess that having recently returned from Darwin, I in no way objected to the convivial break with such pleasant company. But all things, good and otherwise, have to come to an end, and so we found ourselves off to Wedge.

After the rough and ready conditions of Darwin, I was impressed with the contrasting and luxurious accommodation on the island - the excellent engine housing - the piped water (no longer from a soak at the edge of a billabong) - and the Doover erected and ready up on the hill, all set for us to get on with the job. We still had to wait for the ketch JOHN ROBB to arrive with the rest of the personnel, the Radar gear, my two sergeants, the aerial matching and phasing team and of course the rest of the station bods. Eventually all arrived including the matching and phasing team with F/O Ben Asman in charge. The radar installation was relatively quick and easy except that the Receiver was 'on the blink,' - and no spares had been sent from RIMU. Fortunately a signal tracer had been sent, usually a fairly useless bit of gear for AW sets, but I remembered that it shared a similar circuit to that in the Receiver with the 955 valve. It was only a few minutes work to replace the faulty resistance etc. On my return to RIMU I arranged for a set of spares to be sent.

7 Radar was then in service, only waiting for the radio link to be established. The date on air was 22nd April 1943. I remember that as the next day I caught up with my washing, 23rd April 1943 which was my 21st birthday.

Soon afterwards Ray Welfare arrived so we were off to 1RIMU Sydney with a kit bag of wet washing.



A TRIBUTE TO A SOUTH OZ RADAR MECH.

Colin Thiele, A.C., who died on September 4th, has been described as one of our State's most respected and decorated writers and who was an inspiration to many. Though not mentioned in his several tributes, Colin, when a young man in 1943, joined the RAAF to become a Radar Mechanic and was eventually posted to 60 RS on Melville Island, afterwards becoming one of a mobile team of radar trouble shooters. Colin became Principal of a Teaching College near Adelaide. He wrote more than 100 books including classics such as Storm Boy and Sun on the Stubble. Colin came from Eudunda, and died at the age of 85.

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DOES WEDGE ISLAND DESERVE A PLAQUE ?

Over several years now, there has been a succession of radar plaques set up at various locations around Australia, their purpose being to mark old radar station sites with history and heritage becoming more important as the years roll by.

Also plaques have been placed in Canberra and at other memorial sites where radar has earned an honorable mention - the Darwin Cenotaph being one of these.

All are important of course, and I guess we all like to see the places of our war-time service so marked...but without doubt the plaque placed at Dripstone, at the 3IRS site, holds the most significance being the first station in an operational area - even more so than that at Shepherds Hill which was the first station in Australia.

I know of a few others in the north particularly - Truscott, Kalumburu and Montalivet Island come to mind - and probably there are other northern sites.

Down south, I know Allan Ferguson attended the unveiling of a plaque for 35RS south of Albany, and I have photos from Keith Backshall of the plaque for 32RS on Rottness Island. 10RS, our sister station in South Oz, also had a plaque on the Tx wall when I visited the old blockhouse in 1983. I hope it is still there and has not been souvenired.

So - what of the more isolated sites such as Wedge Island ? I very much doubt that a plaque on Wedge would be seen by too many, or pilfered for that reason.

Maybe a spot on a 35 foot fishing cutter might be more appropriate, though I don't think that would be too popular with the general public either.... do you ?

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W.W.2 RADAR PLAQUE DEDICATION.

A 'Stop-Go' progress through the years has been the story of the most recent RAAF Memorial near Canberra. It has been an Air Force Assn. project on the Federal Highway from Sydney to Canberra and was actually begun in 1952 with several 'Stops' and just as many 'Starts' as the Assn. Presidents have come and gone over the years, and the number of volunteers has varied. There have been other Memorials undertaken or established out there in the natural bushland - all have tended to lapse for varying periods, or have made little progress - and there have been some mighty big difficulties for the Assn. to overcome, such as lack of accessibility, and the bush moving back to reclaim its own, not to mention the lack of water. The lack of water availability was the biggest hurdle to overcome when building the Memorial cairn which was intended to be the focal point of the RAAF Area.

Water, building materials and tools were carted out to the site by the volunteers - and gradually the Memorial took shape.

Meanwhile, easy access was denied as the highway itself was changed - and despite the provision of suitable signs and indicators, the RAAF area remained largely inaccessible. However, in more recent times, major improvements have occurred. The Cairn was dedicated in 1980, and the Department for the Interior has provided some maintenance. There has been some landscaping, tree planting, and many RAAF units have established their own memorials near the principal one. There are plans to establish a rest area with some picnic facilities, and two black marble tablets now mark the entrance to the grove. A large metal cross also surmounts the Memorial Cairn - the cross was placed in position by a helicopter from Fairbairn.

On 22nd March 2006, we had our own special Radar ceremony at the RAAF Memorial Grove. There was a plaque dedication, the plaque being identical to that dedicated at the Australian War Memorial 2 or 3 years ago.

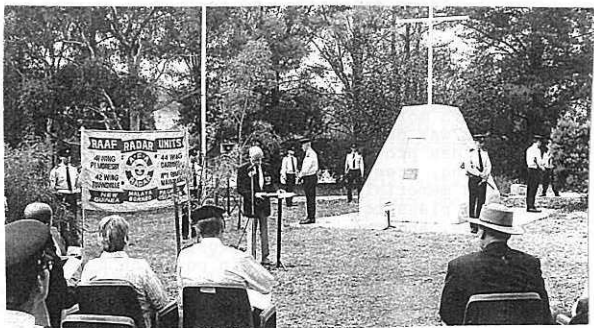
There was a strong RAAF attendance - RAAF Officers and ex RAAF Radar types; there was a firing party; WAAAF and WRAAF ladies; and a RAAF Chaplain who was in charge of the Dedication Ceremony which was conducted very formally.

There was a Welcome - an Address and Unveiling of the plaque, then the Dedication and Blessing. A wreath laying ceremony then followed, then came the Ode, followed by the Last Post and Rouse. Then followed an important final gesture....a Light Luncheon with Refreshments.





The plinth marking the entry to the RAAF Memorial Grove.



Introduction and welcome - Mr. Walter Fielder- Gill.



The Dedication and Blessing of the Radar Plaque, G/C Noel Williams, Chaplain.



The RAAF party at the ceremony.



The Chaplain addresses the gathering.



All photos
from Allan
Dennison.

The Radar Plaque.



Port Lincoln on the move....the latest project.

FINDING A BED IN PORT LINCOLN.

I see there's a new high rise hotel to be established in Port Lincoln which will probably offer a different sort of customer service to that offered in our hey-day at the dear old Great Northern.

The new Port Lincoln Hotel is reported to cost about \$45m, and will be the biggest regional hotel in South Oz, 7 stories high and with 111 rooms. It will be financed by the Sarin group of tuna fishermen and will be leased by Crows players Ricciuto and Goodwin who already have interests in a couple of Adelaide hostels.

These two footie identities some time ago marked the commencement of the project by leaving their footprints in a ceremonial slab of concrete as the work started.

I doubt that the new place will have the same friendly and homely atmosphere as the old Great Northern - perhaps one or two of our old-time Wedge star footballers could have a footprint ceremony out in the footpath outside the front bar of the G.N. - that would maybe bring our old stamping ground really up to date.

But the view from the roof of our old pub just won't be in the race with that from the top of a 7 storey hotel - why - maybe on a clear day Wedge Island itself could be sighted. That would bring on a rush of nostalgia, wouldn't it. But I think we'd still prefer to stay at the Great Northern unless the new one has an A.W. on top to play with.



Our old stamping ground - George's 'Great Northern.'

UNCLE SAM ON THE JOB !



"NOW HEAR THIS.....YOU WILL SUPPLY
one chicken meal every day for ALL my men.

We've all heard those wonderful and almost Unbelievable stories of how dear old UNCLE SAM looked after his enlisted men from the U.S. of A. while they were down under, with fabulous luxuries of all sorts, shapes and sizes. I guess they deserved it all, really. I know I once had a photograph of an AMSCOL van loading its whole cargo of ice cream onto a Liberator bomber.....probably it was in Darwin and being consumed and enjoyed by all ranks before the day's end.

There were stories of chicken meals and other luxurious morsels on the Yanks' mess tables every day, and this was proved by a friend of mine at Potshot who always timed his visits to our Allies camp so that he was invited to stay for lunch, and after an enjoyable meal he returned to his Aussie mates with a description of the meal which caused his mates to choke on their bully beef.

Which reminds me of the story of American visitors from a LORAN station, when invited to an Aussie Radar station for a show, scraped their meal of M. and V. or Bully into the scrap bin after a brief taste....and no wonder.

But the Lu-Lu of all stories for our radar men came about when they moved into the American LORAN stations. The Yanks moved out to return to the U.S. of A. and just left their camps as they were. The men's living tents were bug-proofed with fly wire, and all had proper flooring. But it was the facilities that left our men wide-eyed with wonder....washing machines, water coolers, and refrigerators were the norm, and our Aussie types were almost at a loss when expected to use these luxuries which they hardly had seen at home even.

But the most astonishing story of all came from our old friend Theo while he was on Bathurst Island. There were American girls at the the Yank LORAN camp and Theo recalled they all enjoyed a game of baseball together. Being a gentleman, Theo stood back to let a girl at the ball...."You Aussies are too shy" she told him.

However, there was one luxury our Allies didn't care for up north....that was hot showers which just came out of the tap whether they liked it or not.. But the Americans were wonderful friends and Allies, and if they were a bit spoiled with all these things, who can blame them.

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SOME STRANGE FACTS FROM OUR HISTORIES.

Scattered through the pages of our histories, we find the occasional mention of a radar station after its active service had ended. Usually the Doover and its gear just disappeared into disposals (or maybe the sea). Perhaps the camp buildings were sold to the highest bidder. But occasionally there remains an impressive relic, or an amazing story of the war years telling of the early years before the 'bolt together' Doovers appeared. Yankalilla, Cape Otway and Wilson's Prom. still have their old concrete blockhouses - doubtless there are others along the east coast also showing their age.

The massive concrete igloos of the ACO's are in a class of their own, and are virtually indestructable, and it would be interesting to record their post-war stories if such were possible. Nevertheless, we do know the fate of a few. Some became farmers' barns when the land reverted to its 'civvy' owner, and the 12 inch igloos on Ash Island near Newcastle became popular and really well known when they became Visitors' Centres telling the story of the island and district.

The Pictorials also hold the surprising story of an ACO aerial mast that became the roofing timbers for a shearing shed or two; and there's another hard to believe story about a few of the Fitters on Radar Stations who slept alongside their thumping charges and woke instantly if there was a variation in the engine beat.

However, the strangest story coming to light so far has only just surfaced...it tells of the igloo engine room of 11 RS - the station that was completed but never 'on air' - The site was at Robe down in the S.E. of South Oz. The war had moved northwards, and Robe was one of four or five radars in S.A. that were filed in the W.P.B. so to speak.

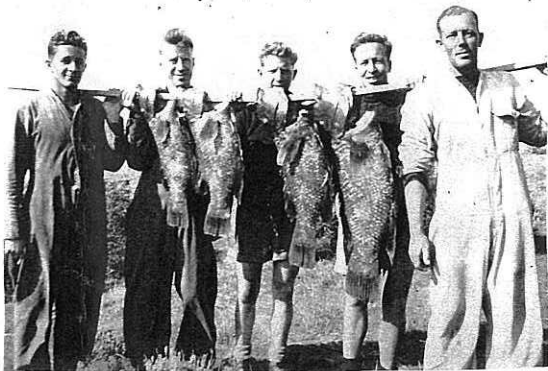
But the igloo engine rooms were already complete and equipped...so the engines were removed and eventually the land and igloos were disposed of.

In 1959, the lower igloo at the base of the hill became a comfortable beach house, furnished with two bunk beds and a single bed, also with bookshelves and a chest of drawers.. A kitchen and eating room were added at the back, and a car-port and shelter were added to the side. Even though it lacked electricity, the old igloo made a cool and comfortable shack much to the satisfaction of the owners.

Today's owners, descendants of the first residents, will be sorry to see it go if the local council claims it for the local golf course extensions.

A photo of the holiday home is in our display today.

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"LET'S GO FISHING TODAY."

Did you happen to catch the fishing article in the Sunday Mail before Christmas? Leaving Wirrina in a 45 footer, the first day and night was spent at N.W. Kangaroo Island catching the mighty red snapper and the delectable King George whiting. The catch must have been put 'on ice' or a bit small....for next morning breakfast was at 5 a.m. and of all things, was bacon and eggs. Then it was off to those parts more familiar to us. Well....almost familiar, for the next place to 'drop-a-line' was The Cabbage Patch - a reef located roughly between Wedge and the Neptunes.

We knew this area as the province of the 15 footers, but now they were chasing the blue-fin tuna, and with plenty of success evidently, for in no time the bag limit was reached and duly deposited in the freezer.

Over the next two days there was great sport called 'catch and release' and the happy anglers spent time at or on Neptune, Wedge and Thistle, and the report tells that they even came across blue groper, king-fish and samson fish, whatever they are.

Our own fishing team of '43 and '44 used to do pretty well for us with some big 'uns being hauled in along the southern coastline of Wedge, and even in the rock pools, and I reckon Doug and Harry and Keith and Jim would all have been amazed at the present day cost of this expedition - \$1550 - good value though in this day and age.

But I reckon our champs could have given them a few clues for much less.....6 bob a day or thereabouts.

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Those who spent any time at all on 39RS at Pt. Keats will certainly remember Father Docherty and Brother John Pye. Well - Brother John recently celebrated and enjoyed his 100th. birthday ! I sent 'Congrats' from myself and on behalf of ALL radar men. I received a reply...he is living at the Masonic Village Darwin, and his doctors are worried because they can't find anything wrong with him !

The Organiser's Thanks to his personal helpers, particularly to his right arm Claire - to Jan and Ian - Nathan and Lachlan - and to No. 1 John Beiers who does such a wonderful job for us oldies. Our helpers are the reason why our Reunion continues so happily.

A sad loss....Len Paech died 28th. December aged 92. A separate Obit is enclosed.

Len was Friend to everyone. and we will miss his friendship. Rest quietly and easily Len.

Back in '43 and '44 when the weather and storms cut off communications between Wedge and Gawler, our transmissions were relayed via 10RS at Cape Jervis.

This year a special invitation was sent to a few of the veterans of 10RS - and if any are with us today...."Welcome !" It's beaut to have you with us. Please regard this Reunion as your own.

I read a funny one at the time of the Census last year. A collector from Port Lincoln had a rather unenviable round of homes to visit....including homes on islands out from Lincoln. Wedge Island featured on his homes to visit.

Can you imagine....first of all calling at Wedge to distribute the Census material, then collecting the results afterwards. How frustrating if there was no one home when you knocked on the door ! O.K. if you could deliver groceries or similar, I suppose.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Terry Arnott at the age of 53. Terry spoke to us last year on heritage listing of war-time sites.

Well, that's it for 2007 I guess. See you next year, hopefully.

From Len's 7 Radar friends.



Len Paech,

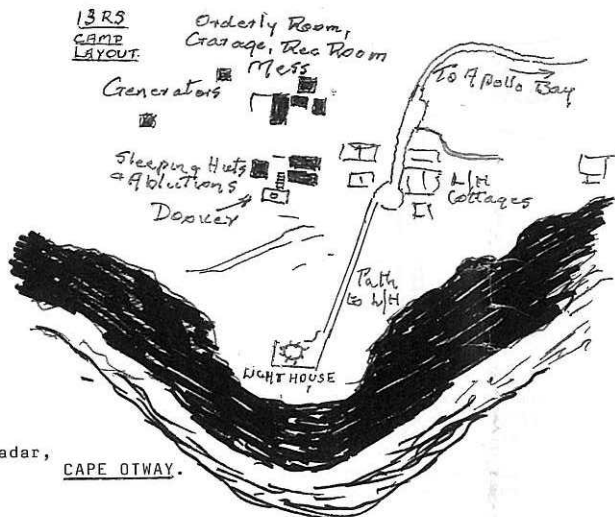
37 Radar,
7Radar, and
330 Radar.

Our Tribute To Len. Few Radar Operators could equal Len in their operational service in the defence of Australia - particularly back in 1942 when things were really serious. He became one of the early radar operators, and at the age of 28 was sent off to Milne Bay to 37RS which was a front line radar station at the time. Here Len operated on COL equipment, watching for enemy planes heading down towards Milne Bay and Pt.Moresby, and also watching for enemy shipping heading down with the same evil intent.

But then came the reward....Len was posted home, and out to 7RS on Wedge Island where he filled something of a paternal role and the voice of experience for the many young 18 year-olds posted there straight from Richmond Radar School to gain experience and knowledge. On Wedge the gear was the Australian AW - and with the winds and seas coming straight from the South Pole (or so it seemed at times) the island life seemed far removed from the heat and stress of Milne Bay. Len was also able to indulge a little in his sporting interests, even if it was only 10-a-side football or a game of cricket if the weather allowed. Len was always an avid sportsman, and even in the early 1930's when employed in the Public Service as a clerk in the Police Commissioner's Office, he was regularly to be found challenging all-comers to billiards or snooker in the Canteen where he had his fair share of success.

But then in 1944 it was back to PNG - to Pt. Moresby and on to Madang. On 330RS the gear was the renowned LW/AW, favoured by our Allies as well as the Aussies - and so Len became a very experienced operator.

Len - and Lorna while she was still with us - both ably supported our Wedge Reunions, and we enjoyed their company over many years. So Len fulfilled his radar role from 1942 to 2006. He was an amiable chap who will be sadly missed.
Len died on 28th. December 2006 aged 92 years.



13 Radar,
CAPE OTWAY.

13 Radar at Cape Otway was one of Australia's earliest coastal stations. A concrete blockhouse was constructed to house the gear which was a mixture of AW and CD/CHL - and without doubt the station's primary task was to watch for enemy shipping- minelayers and subs. - for an American freighter, the CITY OF RAYSVILLE - had struck a mine and sunk in the southern waters close by the cape.

The station commenced operating in June 1942- hardly a stone's throw from the historic old lighthouse of 1848.... and the radar camp was set up behind the radar Doover. Strangely, no photos have ever surfaced to show personnel or buildings, but evidently an aerial shot was taken during its life-time, and from this one can conjure up a good idea of 13 RS.

Despite the often very rough weather, the place had an almost wild coastal beauty, and was popular with all posted there. The township of Apollo Bay offered some enjoyable respite from station life with its pubs, dances and picture shows.

In August 2006 a commemorative plaque was fixed to the old blockhouse - and in January 2007 our photographer Claire was among 500 visitors, and she was able to take a few photos. Her verdict was that Cape Otway is well worth a visit if ever in the vicinity and well worth the 20 odd km. drive from the Bay.

